

Congress Must Reject the Application to Russia of the Crazy AUMF (Post 9/11 Authorization for Use of Military Force)

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The US has no business joining the war in Ukraine, and Congress should refuse to approve any measure that endorses direct intervention in the conflict. Rep. Adam Kinzinger is sponsoring a new [resolution](#) authorizing the use of American military force in the war, and it is vital that Congress rejects it. Kinzinger has been one of the loudest agitators for military action in Ukraine, and he wants this authorization in order to give the president a free hand to take the US into a potentially catastrophic war.

Kinzinger’s resolution would give the president authorization to use force to “assist” in “defending and restoring the territorial integrity of Ukraine” in the event of a Russian biological, chemical, or nuclear attack. Lumping these types of attacks together serves to blur the differences between them, and if the resolution passed it would draw an unnecessary red line that the US would then be under pressure to enforce. The president should make clear that he doesn’t want the authority Kinzinger is proposing, and Kinzinger’s colleagues in Congress should firmly repudiate his warmongering by voting down his resolution.

If the US did what Kinzinger wanted, it would lead at best to a dangerous and unnecessary war for the United States and at worst it would lead to a nuclear exchange that would devastate our country and much of the world. It makes no sense to respond to Russian unconventional attacks with an armed intervention that makes it more likely that Russia launches many nuclear strikes. The Russian government has made it abundantly clear that direct intervention by outside powers in Ukraine would trigger a severe response, and that is widely assumed to include the use of nuclear weapons. It would be reckless in the extreme to assume that the Russian leadership is bluffing about that.

Because the resolution refers to “restoring” Ukraine’s territorial integrity, that implies that

the US would be expected to participate in retaking every piece of territory that has been under Russian control since 2014. That would presumably include using US forces to take Crimea, which Moscow now considers to be part of its territory. If direct US intervention in the war didn't provoke further escalation from Russia right away, trying to seize control of Crimea surely would.

The resolution obscures the reality of what would be involved in providing this "assistance," since it would necessarily mean open war with Russia and it would presumably require US attacks on Russian soil. Once US forces start attacking the Russian military, retaliation against the US and its European allies would be inevitable. That would mean turning a local war into a general war between the two states with the largest nuclear arsenals on the planet. There is no scenario in which a general war between the US and Russia results in anything but massive death and destruction for all parties. Actively courting that outcome as Kinzinger does is pure madness. For all of Kinzinger's talk of "standing with our allies," his preferred course of action would very likely lead to huge losses of life in dozens of allied countries.

Even if the consequences of using force were not so grave, it would be foolish to authorize the use of force in advance. We have seen before with the Gulf of Tonkin resolution and the 2002 AUMF what happens when Congress hands over blanket, open-ended authority to the president, and we also know how these authorizations can be stretched and applied in ways that they were not intended to be used. Congress should never volunteer to give the president authority to wage a war, especially one as potentially costly and disastrous as a war with Russia over Ukraine. Pre-authorizations like the one Kinzinger proposes are the foreign policy equivalent of loaded guns, and they prematurely cede authority to the president to decide on the question of war. Nothing good can come from them, and they are designed for the sole purpose of getting the US into wars that have nothing to do with defending this country.

Among its other defects, the resolution also uses dishonest language. The text of the resolution refers to defending the "territorial integrity of United States allies," but Ukraine is the only country whose territory is mentioned in the resolution. Crucially, Ukraine is not and never has been an ally of the United States. Not only is the US not obliged to go to war for Ukraine, but the US also has no vital interests in Ukraine that could possibly justify doing so. Kinzinger's description of Ukraine as an ally is a bit of sleight-of-hand that many hawks in both parties have used before, but it doesn't withstand scrutiny. He is calling on the US to defend the territory of allies, but that is exactly what going to war to defend Ukraine wouldn't be.

Going to war with Russia is not in the interests of the United States or its treaty allies, and there is no plausible scenario in which it is.

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